



U.S. Department of State Career Transition Center

CTC NEWSLETTER

(Print Version)

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*Happy
Mother's
Day!*

*"The phrase
'working mother' is
redundant."*

- Jane Sellman

HOME OFFICES

*- Prepared by the CTC Staff in honor of
the March 2004 JSP Class who inspired it*

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4.12 million Americans are working at home. This article will simply introduce the subject of home office set-ups.

Much has been written about the subject to guide you in creating an office in your home. And there are many experts you can hire to set up and organize a home office for you.

Location, Location, Location

Important factors to consider when choosing the location of your home office are:

- Size
- Privacy
- Light

- Electrical and communication power and outlets
- Climate – temperature and humidity
- Ventilation
- Entry



*"We don't know who we
are until we see what
we can do."*

- Martha Grimes

Some possible locations for a home office include:

- hiring an architect and contractor to add an office to your house or redesign an existing space
- guest bedroom
- closet or pantry
- corner nook in the kitchen or a bedroom
- garage
- stair landing
- a room divided by a "wall" of bookshelves or a divider screen

There are many strong reasons

why a home office should be set up in a separate room all on its own:

- A separate room physically separates your business from the rest of your home.
- The door provides privacy and keeps out noise.
- It also defines your space – when you are there, you are working; when you leave, you close the door and leave your work behind.
- A separate room can help promote self-discipline and increase efficiency.
- A separate room allows you to create a professional atmosphere in which to conduct your business and meet your clients.
- It's easier to claim for tax deductions!

There are numerous other considerations in choosing the location of your home office. An interior room in your house may lack any natural light, expose you to more household noise and distraction, and require your client to walk through the private areas of your house. It should be a space where you like to be, where you can be comfortable and productive.

Privacy

In a home office, work space and life space are in very close proximity. You need to make your home office space private while you are working and protected while you are not. And you need to plan well in order to minimize any conflicts between your business and your family.

You don't want the growth of the information, supplies, and/or products you must store on-site to encroach upon your living space.

Buy a computer just for your business.

You don't want family members using it for e-mails to their friends and computer games! Seriously consider a separate telephone and answering service just for your business. It will give a more professional impression and be easier to declare on your taxes as a professional expense.



"Every morning, I get up and look through the 'Forbes' list of the richest people in America. If I'm not there, I go to work."

- Robert Orben

Design

According to Neal Zimmerman in his article "Home Office Design: Basic Planning and Organizing" for the Business@Home

website (www.gohome.com), the primary features of a home office are the working space, the support space, and the storage space:

- The working space is where the work is accomplished and where you will spend the most time.
- The support space includes a conference area; the area in which mail is received, distributed, and sent; the reference library; a restroom; and other support sites. The support space may be located separately (i.e., in another room) from the working space, although some efficiency and convenience is sacrificed if it is.
- The storage space includes active storage that you need everyday and inactive storage that you can store in re-

mote storage areas. It also includes important documents such as your business registration, tax papers, and other irreplaceable documents.

Limit the furniture to the essentials – too much furniture makes the room look cluttered and makes movement less efficient. Remove any furniture from your office that does not serve a professional purpose.

If you have limited space in your home office, you may have to furnish it vertically to fit everything in. Built-in shelving will save space. Modular office furniture is affordable and often uses space more efficiently than individual pieces. You can also buy modular furniture that can be expanded as your requirements change and grow.

Make sure furniture and equipment are positioned in a practical way. Place everything strategically according to how you use it and how often you use it. Consider function over aesthetics. You will need easy access to frequently used materials and equipment. Place a bookshelf, working files, and your telephone within easy reach. Most designers recommend an L-shape, U-shape, or triangular layout for office furniture and equipment as the most comfortable, convenient, and attractive.

If you are easily distracted, don't put your desk in front of a window. Place your desk close to electrical and telephone outlets. Strive for the most working surface area possible, so you can spread your projects out when needed. Save work surface space with floor lamps and clip on lamps.



"A computer can figure out all kinds of difficult problems, except the problem of how to pay for it."

- Anonymous

When planning placement of your equipment, don't forget the cable heads that stick out of printers and faxes, the space required to pull out the paper loader on printers and copiers, and space on your desk for a document holder to prop up the papers you are using while working on your computer.

Your telephone should be placed where you can reach it easily and quickly and where noise from children, pets, televisions, and

stereos will not interfere.

Your organization system is as important as the furniture you store your files in. If you have an organized system, then you are more likely to file those loose papers and be able to find them more easily.

Include a planning system that will help you organize your activities. This could include a computer or a Palm Pilot or a *Dayrunner* or a bulletin board – whatever matches your style and needs.

Adequate storage space will help you control clutter in your home office and is particularly important in small spaces. Try to store similar items together to make finding them easier.

When decorating your home office, strive for a look that blends residential and professional by choosing patterns and colors that are warm and soothing instead of cold and stark. Draperies and wall-to-wall carpeting help keep the room warm and control noise. Consider space, furniture, and equipment for amenities such as a coat rack and a coffee maker.

Think Like a GSO

Is there enough space to perform the job you have in mind? If your business grows, will there be space for an assistant? A separate entrance to the office is a good idea as is access to a separate bathroom.

Before buying anything, test drive the room by sitting in the proposed work space and working on your computer, writing a letter, and reading a book. Determine how much more light you will need and where it should be placed. Good lighting is important for your physical and mental health. Lighting should include ambient light from windows and overhead fixtures as well as task lighting which is directed at a single work area.

Equipment wires and cables are unsightly and can pose safety hazards. When choosing office furniture, look for built-in wire management systems or purchase channels or fasteners that group the wires and cables together and hide them by attaching them to the underside or back of furniture.

Make sure the electrical power supply to the room and the number of outlets are adequate. Some office equipment draws so much power that other appliances cannot be plugged into the same outlet.

Before you even set up the office, you may want to plug in all your equipment and use it as you would during a normal business day. If breakers pop or lights dim, then you need to consult a licensed electrician. If you haven't bought the equipment yet, then you may want to have the licensed electrician evaluate your



"I do most of my work sitting down; that's where I shine."

- Robert Benchley

possibilities. You will need to give him a list of the equipment you plan to install with the wattage of each piece. One machine that combines several functions may be the perfect answer for space and electrical problems. For instance, you can buy a printer that also works as a fax, a copier, and a scanner. Whichever option you choose, this is a very important step – do NOT skip it! You don't want to lose data, damage expensive equipment, or burn down your house!

Make sure there is good ventilation in your home office. Your electronic equipment will generate heat. Heat can damage the equipment and make you uncomfortable. This is a common problem in small home offices. You may need to buy a special air-conditioning unit or a fan for the office.

Furniture

Before you purchase any furniture or equipment for your home office, make a shopping list. Rank the items in order of priority, then separate "needs" and "wants." Initially, you should only purchase the necessities. As you develop your business, your needs will be clarified and may change. The necessities may include:

- Desk
- Chair
- Filing cabinet
- Bookcase or shelving
- Storage for supplies and media tools (discs, CDs, etc.)

Before you buy any furniture, you should also measure the room and the furniture proposed for it, then sketch a layout plan to make sure everything will fit.

One option is to lease furni-

ture and equipment when you first start out. This will allow you to test drive it to see if it really works for you and it will increase your flexibility as your company grows (or not!). If you need certain office equipment only occasionally, then renting it as needed or buying the service at Kinko's or Staples may be the best way to go. Be sure to review any rental agreement for early cancellation penalties.

If you use the room for other purposes, you may want to choose furniture that hides your office equipment. Armoires, hutches, and roll top desks can be closed up so that your "office" disappears. If you have limited funds and/or limited space, then try to buy office furniture that serves more than one purpose. This can be as simple as using the top of a file cabinet for your paper cutter, buying a printer stand with paper storage shelves underneath it, or occasionally using your desk as a conference table. When buying furniture, opt for pieces with storage space. Armoires and hutches can hide media equipment and store files and supplies.

Make sure your desk is large enough for your equipment and provides ample space for writing and maybe even conferencing if you need it. A laptop could give you more work surface space as well as mobility. Purchase or install a bigger bookshelf than you think you are going to need. It will fill up faster than you ever imagined!

Equipment

Analyze your equipment needs, make a shopping list, prioritize the list. An equipment list often includes:

- computer
- printer
- scanner



"Benchley and I had an office in the old 'Life' magazine that was so tiny, if it were an inch smaller it would have been adultery."

- Dorothy Parker

- fax machine
- photocopier
- software
- telephone

Some providers of telephone services, data transmission, and computer systems offer free design planning services for office networks.

Most experts recommend a separate phone line for your business, which, of course, is tax deductible and can be listed in the Yellow Pages. Get a telephone with a hold and a speaker button. An answering machine or service is also a good idea.

Separate lines for telephone, fax, and DSL/modem are recommended.

The computer will probably be the most expensive piece of equipment that you will have to purchase for your office. Be sure to purchase it from a reliable vendor that has a good reputation for support. Buy the service contract.

All the literature recommends back-up systems for power and for data storage. Surge protectors can prevent data loss due to fluctuating electrical currents. An UPS (uninterrupted power supply) can give you time to save the document you are working on when there is a power outage. Protect your computer documents and files by developing a schedule to store them on diskettes, zip drives, or other tools and then store those tools off-site.

"A computer lets you make more mistakes faster than any invention in human history — with the possible exceptions of handguns and tequila."

- Mitch Ratliffe

Ergonomics

When setting up your home office, always consider health and safety. In his *Wall Street Journal* article "First, Buy a Good Chair; It Could Cost Hundreds, but May Keep the Doctor Away," Staff Reporter Albert R. Karr states that, "In far too many cases, the home office is a body ache waiting to happen." Remember that on-the-job injuries don't just include tripping over a computer cable, they also include injuries caused by repetitive motion and awkward posture. Ergonomic disorders such as backaches and eyestrain are not only painful, but also decrease efficiency and productivity.



In order to avoid eye-strain, make sure that overhead lighting is not reflected on your computer screen. Light from behind the computer screen will cause glare and eyestrain. Lighting near the computer should come from above or from the side. Facing a bare window is not a good idea. If your office has a window, hang draperies or blinds to cut down on glare.

If you are going to spend a lot of time at your desk, then you should buy a comfortable and sturdy desk chair. Everything we read emphasized this one item as your most important investment. A chair that swivels and rolls is ideal as it allows you to reach everything you need. Ideally, you should be able to adjust the height of the chair so that your line of vision is even with the computer monitor screen while your thighs are parallel to the floor. Make sure that it is at a comfortable height.

Your computer monitor screen should be mounted approximately 5 inches lower than your eyes and 18 to 30 inches away from your body. The document holder should be mounted at the same level as your computer monitor screen and as close to it as possible. Adjustable trays for keyboard and mouse are recommended to avoid strain on arms, shoulders, and wrists. The keyboard should be adjusted so that your lower arms, wrists, and hands are in a straight line when you are using it.

Buy cables and appliances with electrical cords that are long enough. Extension cords can create fire hazards. Cables and cords are easy to trip over.

If you have an area rug in your office, make sure it is tacked down or positioned so that no one will trip on it or catch a chair leg on it. Don't run cables and cords across halls or from one room to another. That is a recipe for disaster. Drill holes or lift baseboards if you have to.

Clients

Consider how a client will enter your office. When a client visits your office, you don't want him to trip over your son's skateboard in the driveway, see the dirty clothes hamper in the hallway, or smell last night's spaghetti and garlic bread. A separate entrance may be a good investment. Also investigate insurance liability coverage.

Other considerations might include:

- Where will the client park?
- Is there a guest bathroom close by?
- Do you have to traipse into the kitchen to pour them a cup of coffee?

Neighbors

In some parts of the United States, there may be zoning regulations regarding home offices, so you need to research local laws and ordinances before you hang out your shingle.

And speaking of shingles, are you going to place a sign in the yard? Does your neighborhood association have rules about that? Also, where will your clients park? Will they bother your neighbors?

Professional Help

There are many books and Internet resources to consult for guidance on setting up your home office and some of those are listed in the “Editor’s Notes” that follow.

If you need professional help to design and build – or rebuild, as the case may be – your home office, then you can find interior designers, architects, and contractors in the yellow pages and online. The Directory of Designers, for instance, covers the entire United States – www.i-d-d.com.

If you need professional help to organize your home office, you can find a professional organizer in the yellow pages or online. The National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) has a great website in which you can type in your zip code and find a professional organizer within a few miles of your house – www.napo.net/. I typed in FSI’s zip code and they produced 31 professional organizers within 10 miles! The Professional Organizers Web Ring (POWR) also offers this free service at www.organizerswebring.com/.



“If a train station is where the train stops, what’s a workstation?”

- Anonymous

Editor’s Notes

Here are some more resources to explore on the subject of setting up a home office:



Bredin, Alice; The Home Office Solution: How to Balance our Professional and Personal Lives While Working at Home.

Barrett, Niall; The Custom Home Office: Building a Complete Workspace.

Creative Publishing International; A Portfolio of Home Office Ideas.

Edwards, Paul and Sarah; Working from Home: Everything You Need to Know About Living and Working Under the Same Roof.

Paul, Donna; The Home Office Book.

Phillips, Barty; The Home Office Planner; 2000.

Proulx, Danny; Build Your Own Home Office Furniture.

Sunset Books; Ideas for Great Home Offices; 1995.

Time-Life Books; Home Offices (Home Repair & Improvement); 1999.

Zimmerman, Neal; Home Office Design: Everything You Need to Know About Planning, Organizing, and Furnishing Your Work Space; 1996.

PowerHomeBiz.com—www.powerhomebiz.com

Office By Design—www.officebydesign.com

Business@Home—www.gohome.com

Small Business Canada—<http://sbinfocanada.about.com>

Home Decorating Made Easy—www.home-decorating-made-easy.com/home-office-design.html

Job Leads



Because we celebrate Mother's Day in May, our leads are two women's organizations this month! Both have excellent job boards (for women and men!) and offer super networking opportunities at interesting events.

Women In International Security - wiis.georgetown.edu

- A formal organization dedicated to promoting women's influence in foreign affairs. WIIS is a part of the Center for Peace and Security Studies (CPASS), in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. They have several active programs, including a speaker series -- good opportunity to network!
- You can subscribe to the Women In International Security website's excellent job bank by joining WIIS for \$40 or \$50 (depending on where you live).

Women In International Trade – www.wiit.org

- A professional association of members who share an interest and expertise in international trade. Largest chapter is in Washington, D.C.
- Membership includes access to an excellent job bank and costs \$65 for individuals (less if government employee).

Attention JSP Grads!



We are looking for graduates who have successfully opened small businesses, including consultancies, to speak with our August and October classes. If you would be willing to serve as a panel member at a future JSP to talk about your new work, please contact Nedra Klee Hartzell (HartzellNJ@state.gov or 703-302-7410).

The next CTC job fair will be held on August 24 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm in the Field House at the Shultz Center (aka NFATC or FSI).



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FSI/TC/CTC

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